

*My Name is Peter Sielman.*

*I am a former Salem Selectman (1993-1997, 1999-2003).*

*I have just received my PhD in Political Science from UCONN with the research topics of:*

**Virtual Town Meeting**

**&**

**Feelings of Political Efficacy.**



*I am here to describe the results of our experiments in Salem and to offer my assistance in the event that you would like to investigate remote participation in your town functions.*

## What is Virtual Town Meeting (VTM)?

- 1) It is a normal town meeting conducted with **Attenders**  
+  
**Remote Participants** (at home, on business, at school, in the armed forces).
- 2) The town meeting proceedings are **Webcast** and/or **Cablecast**.... live.
- 3) **Remote participants** participate in deliberations and vote on motions via **Email** {~ 90 second delay}.
- 4) The **Moderator** performs the normal functions of:  
(a) selecting participants, (b) assuring that all participants understand the options and (c) controlling the voting.

## The Right Kind of Participation

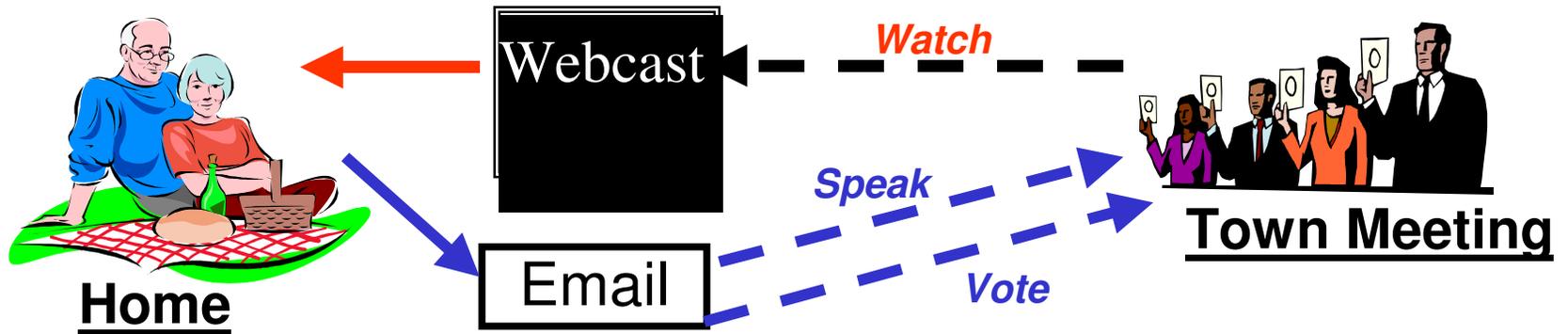
### Zimmerman<sup>1</sup>:

*“In sum, a properly functioning democracy has several advantages over plebiscitary democracy that fosters the illusion of majority rule.*

*Democratic debate engagement on the meeting house floor educates all attendees and encourages them to subordinate their private-regarding views, thereby promoting the public good in terms of decisions made, and strengthening the sense of community.”*

<sup>1</sup> Zimmerman, Joseph F. and Katherine M. Zuber. 2010. Email attachment.

# “VIRTUAL” TOWN MEETING



## To Participate from home:

- Register your email address with the Registrar of Voters.
- Fill out a questionnaire.
- Watch for the schedule of the next “virtual” town meeting

**There are over 2500 eligible voters in Salem**

*Of whom....*

**75** usually attend the Annual Town Meeting.

**35** usually attend most town meetings.

**10** usually attend for minor issues.

---

***130 attended the January 13<sup>th</sup> School  
renovation meeting!***

***21 more participated remotely!***

## 2006 SURVEY RESPONSES

*“I can’t participate because ...”*

*“I don’t want to participate!”*

*“I did not know that I could or should participate”*

## **Virtual Town Meeting Targets are:**

- The willing but not able,
- The interested but tentative,
- The knowledgeable but insecure,
- The busy but time-limited, and
- The cautious but curious.

## TRUSTED ADDRESS LIST

*jane.doe@email.com*

*john smith@college.edu*

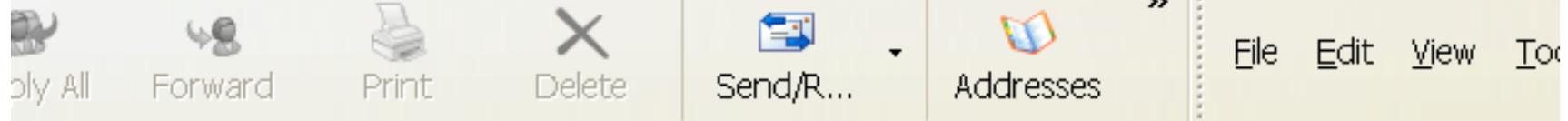
*salemresident@company.net*

.....

**All other email addresses are rejected!**

**208 have signed up .... So far!**

provided by Comcast High-Speed Internet - apsielman

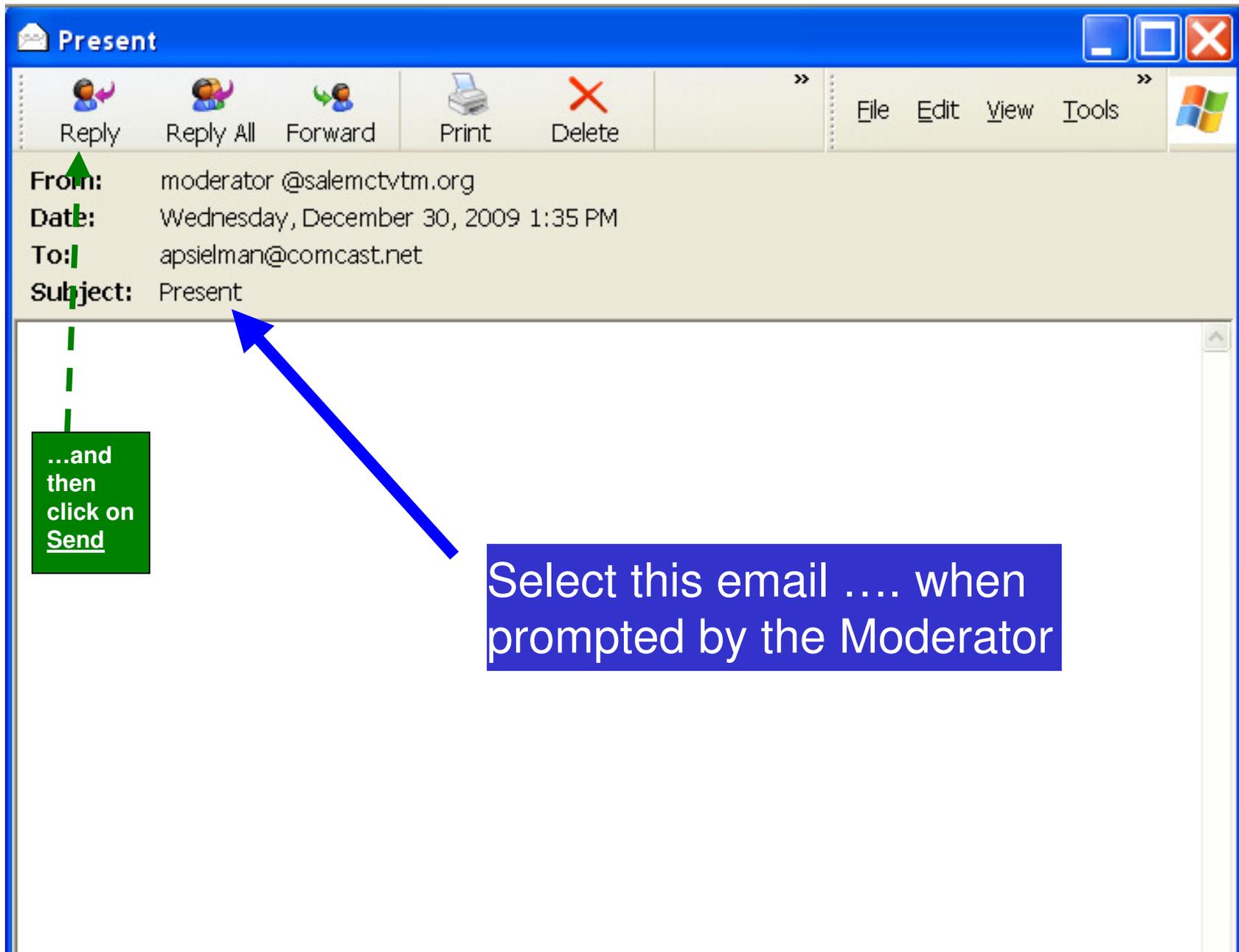


Forward

| From                      | Subject        | Received           |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| ✉ moderator @salemctvt... | Present        | 12/30/2009 1:35 PM |
| ✉ moderator @salemctvt... | Speak          | 12/30/2009 1:36 PM |
| ✉ moderator @salemctvt... | Point-of-Order | 12/30/2009 1:36 PM |
| ✉ moderator @salemctvt... | Yes            | 12/30/2009 1:37 PM |
| ✉ moderator @salemctvt... | No             | 12/30/2009 1:37 PM |

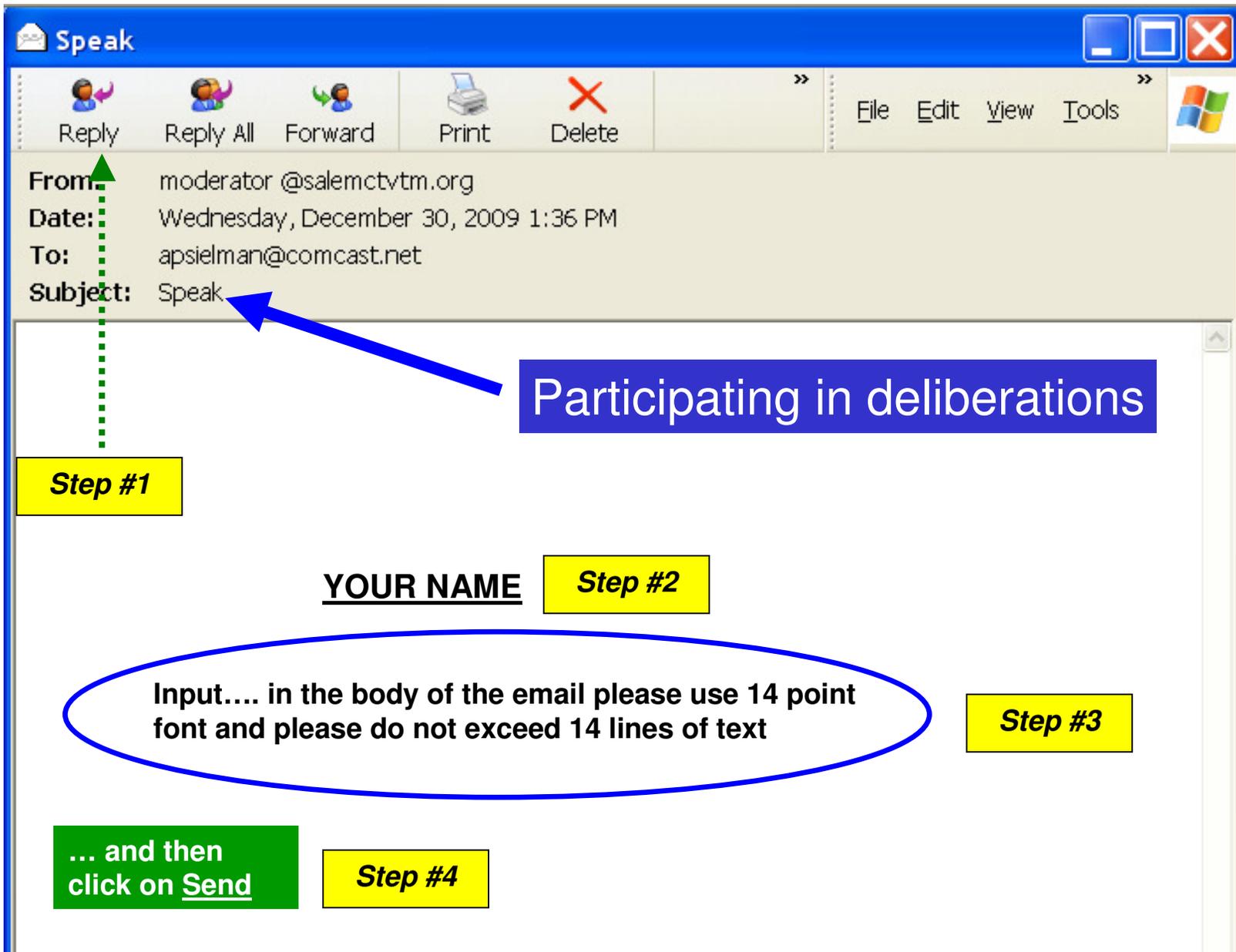
By replying to pre-meeting emails we have:

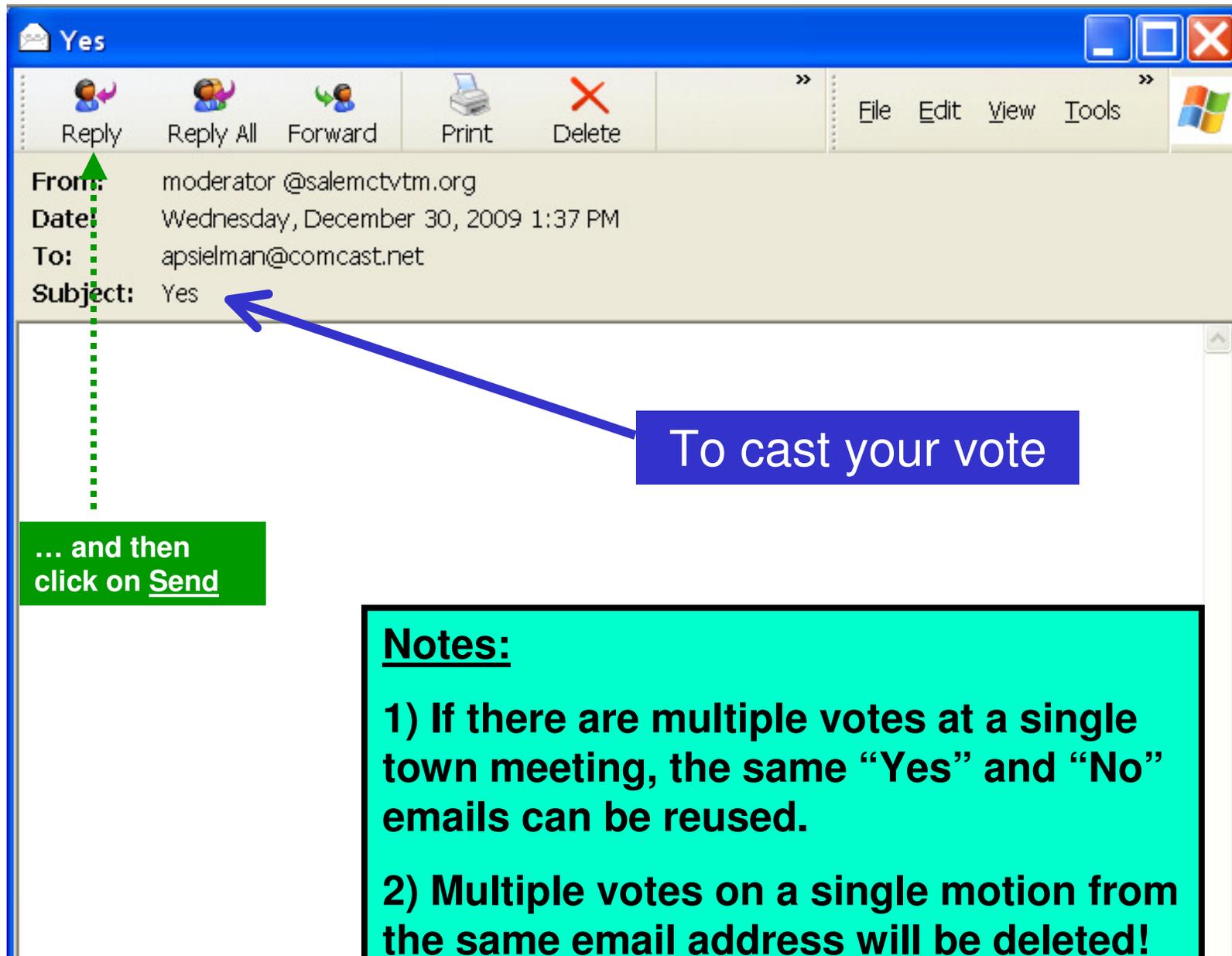
- 1) Simplified the participation process
- 2) Enhanced security



...and  
then  
click on  
Send

Select this email .... when  
prompted by the Moderator





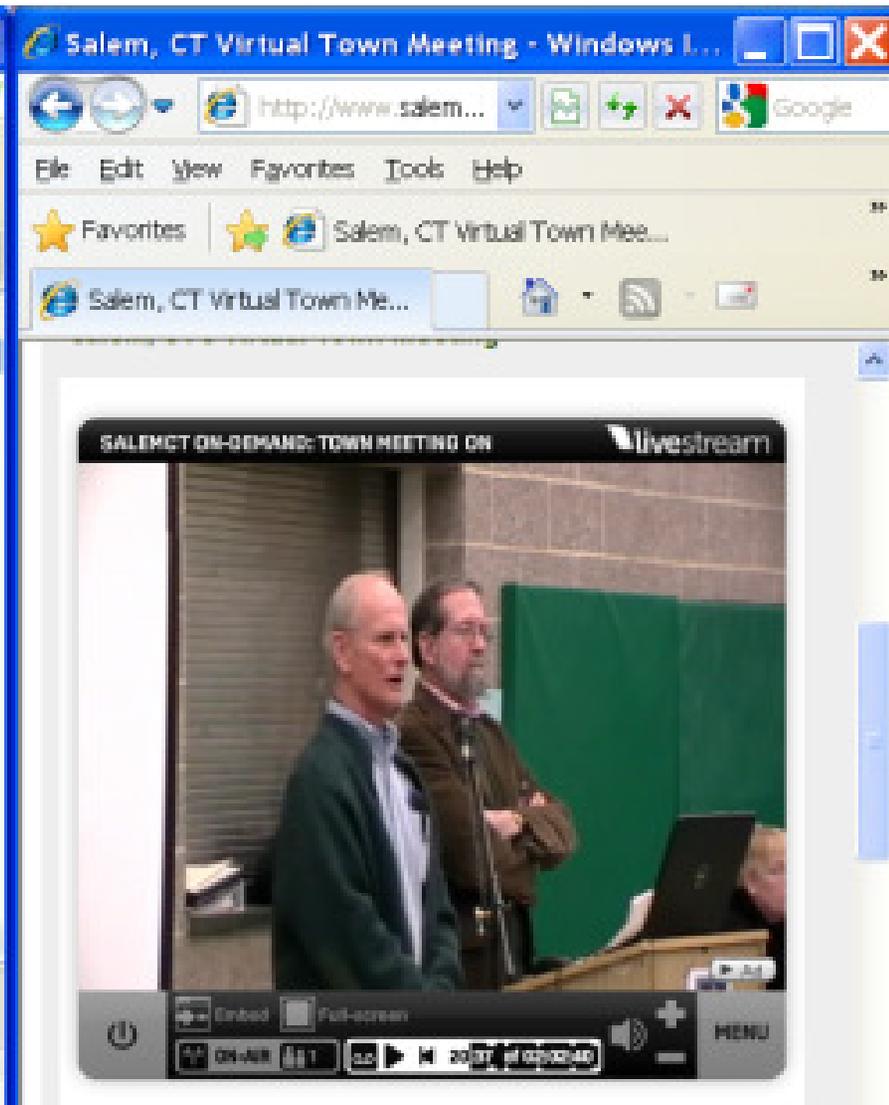
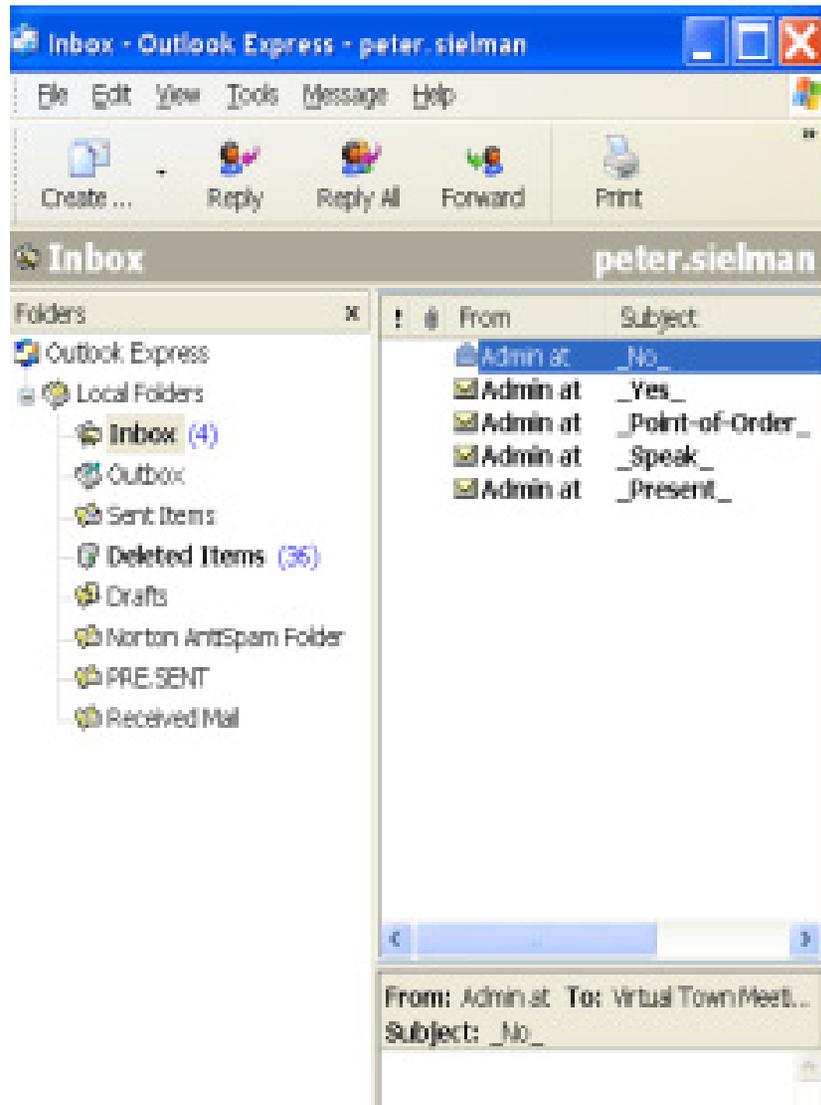
... and then click on Send

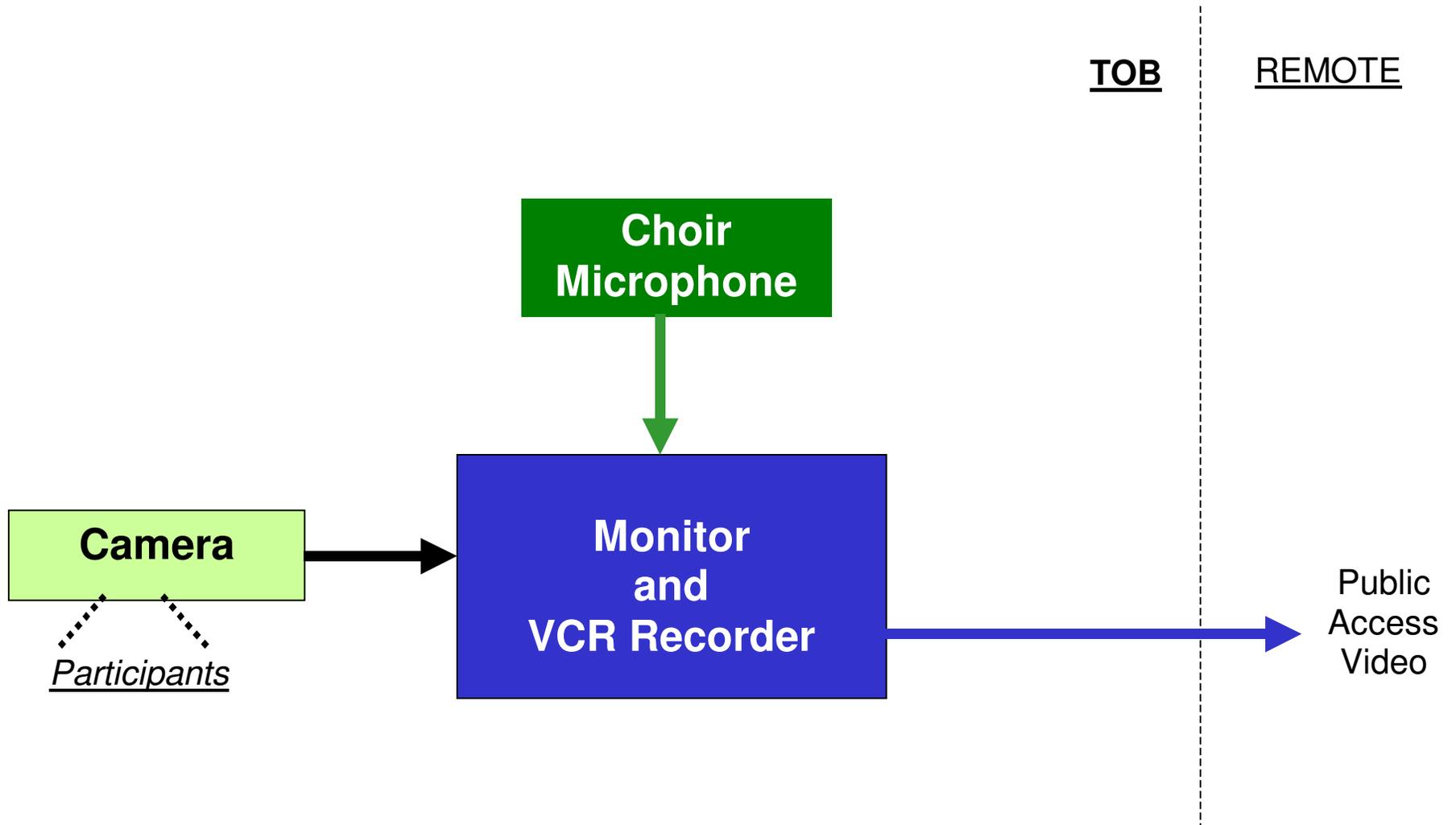
To cast your vote

**Notes:**

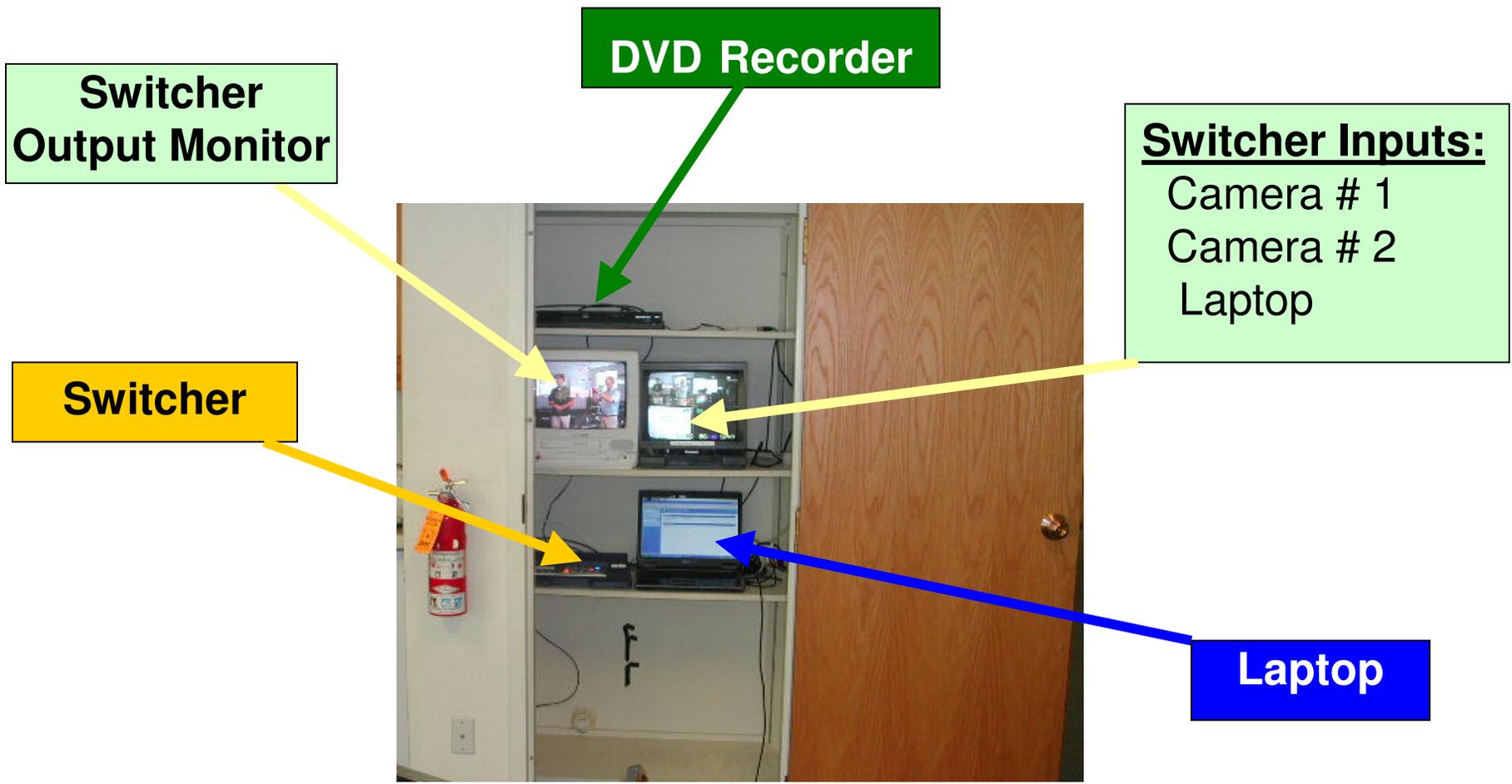
- 1) If there are multiple votes at a single town meeting, the same "Yes" and "No" emails can be reused.**
- 2) Multiple votes on a single motion from the same email address will be deleted!**

## Dual Screen Set-up

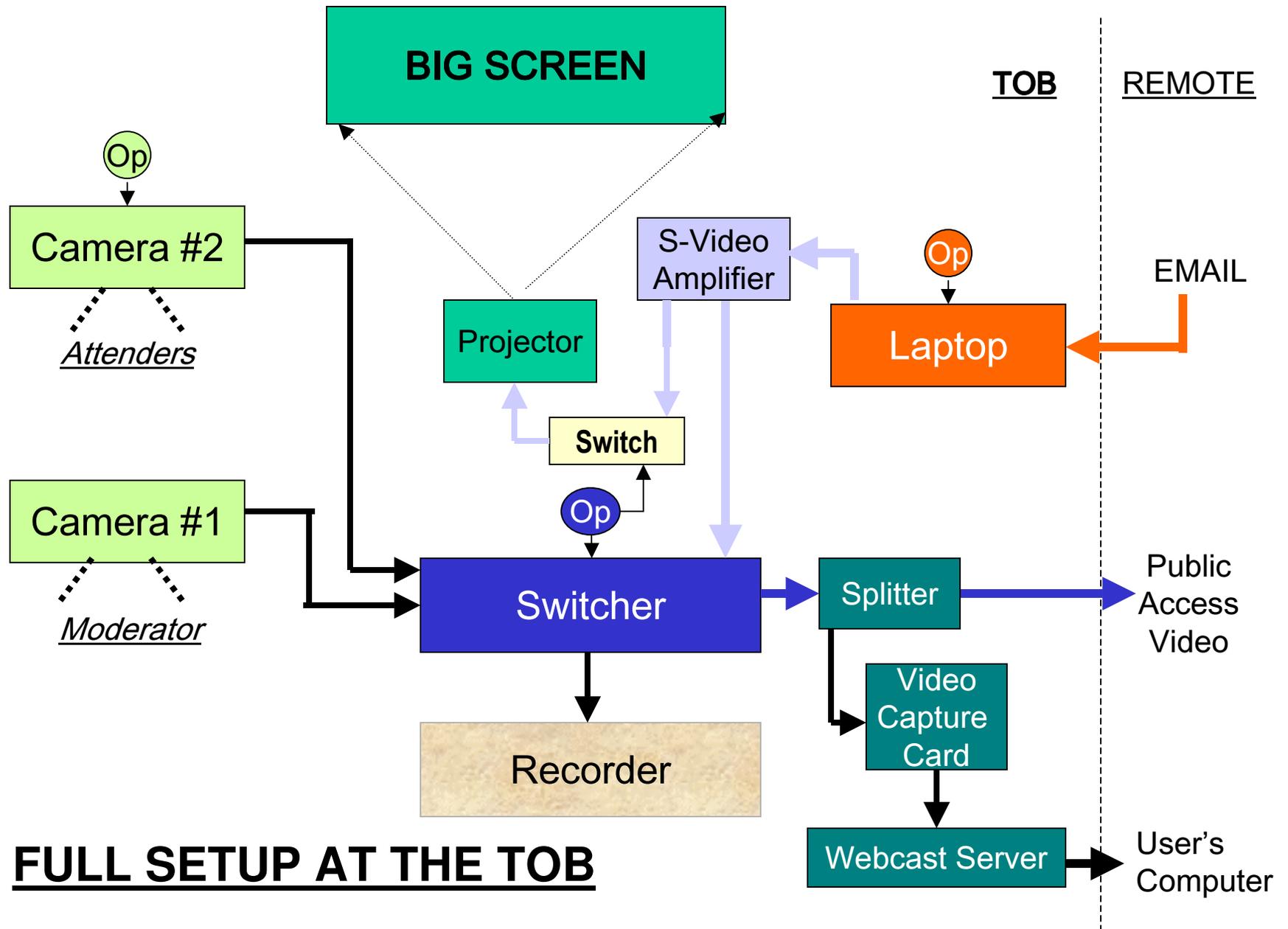


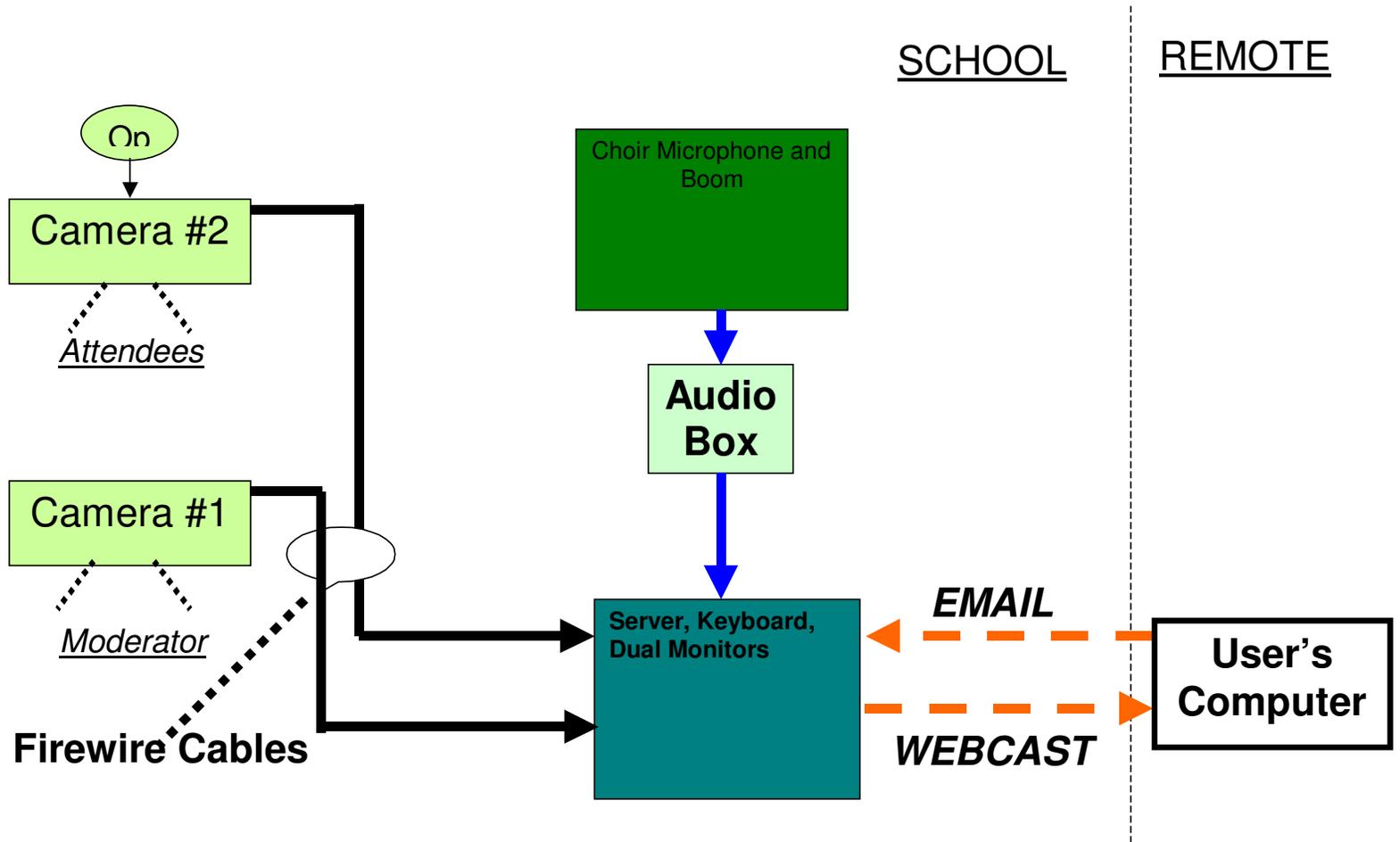


**Figure IIIA-1: Cablecasting from TOB**



**‘Virtual’ Town Meeting Control Station**





**Figure IIIA-4: Mobile All-Digital Remote Participation Equipment**

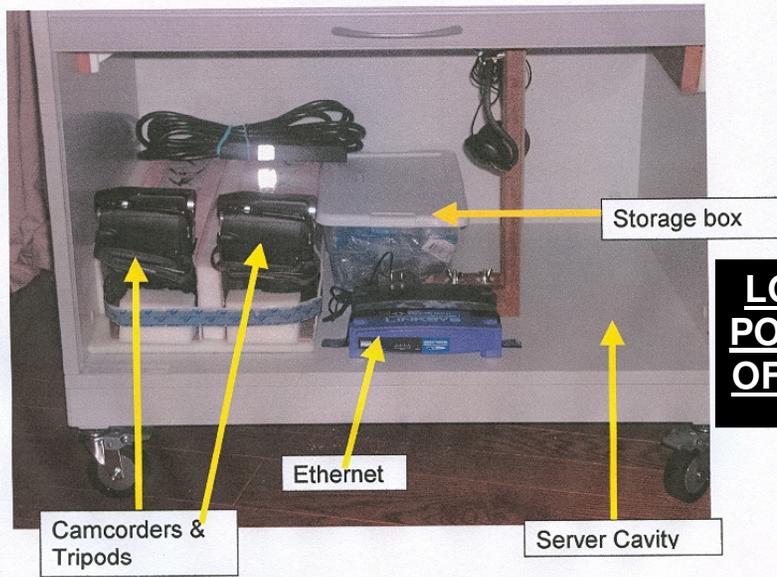
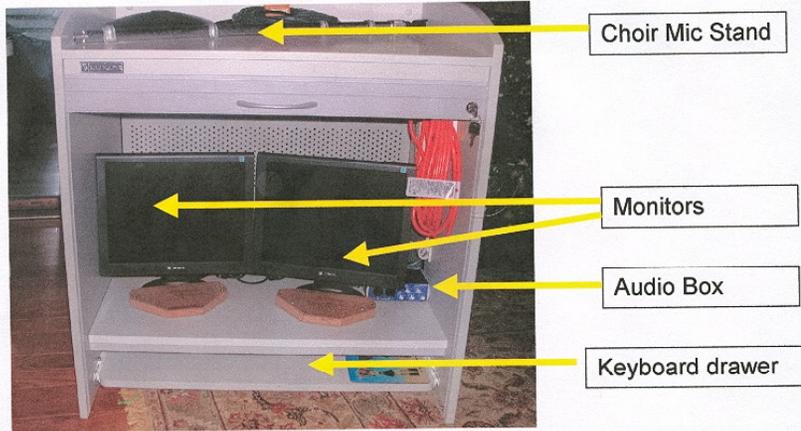
# WEBCASTING CART

*A High School  
Junior*



**COST:**  
Hardware and  
Software ... \$3,000.  
  
To the Town... \$0

**UPPER PORTION OF CART**



**LOWER PORTION OF CART**

**Figure IIIA-5: Cart Layout**

## VIRTUAL TOWN MEETING PARTICIPATION

| Virtual Town Meeting Date →         | Oct 2008      | Apr 2009 | Oct 2009    | Jan 2010 | May 2010 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|----------|-------------|----------|----------|
| <b>Attendees</b>                    | 46            | 11       | 12          | 130      | 72       |
| <b>Signers-up</b>                   | Word of mouth | 118      | 148         | 179      | 208      |
| <b>Uplink Mode</b>                  | Cable         | Cable    | Cable + Web | Web      | Web      |
| <b>Remote Participants</b>          | 14            | 6        | 7           | 21       | 11       |
| <b>Percentage Increase</b>          | 30%           | 54%      | 58%         | 16%      | 15%      |
| <b>Remotes as a % of Signers-up</b> | NA            | 5%       | 5%          | 12%*     | 5%       |

\* Approximately 50% of Signers-up attended the January 2010 virtual town meeting.

## CONCLUSIONS

Not everyone needs to participate.

More participation:

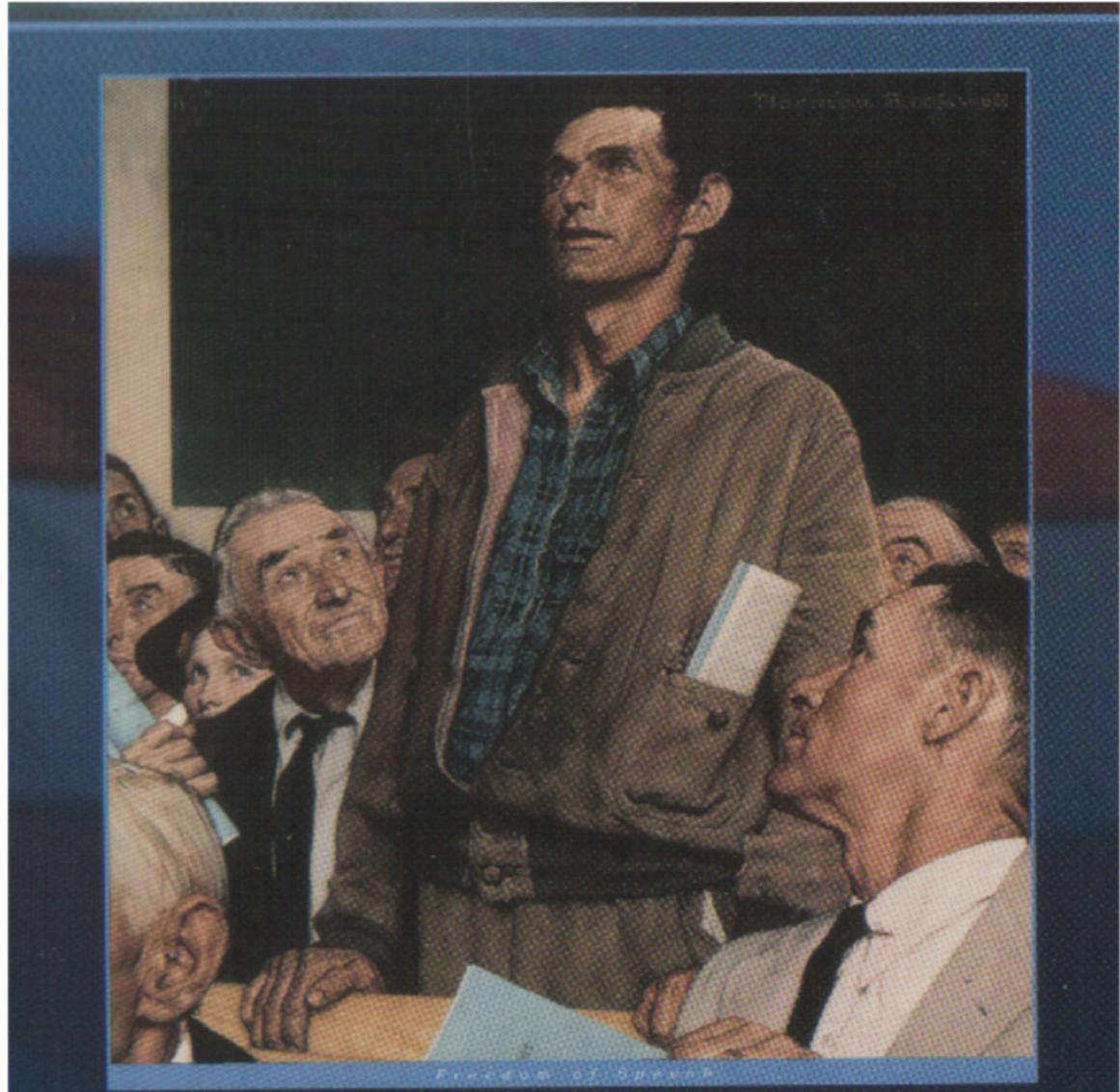
Greater legitimacy

Better decisions

Political efficacy?

.....

Town Meeting as a laboratory for political science studies.



*You can view recorded Salem virtual town meetings at:*

**[www.salemct.org](http://www.salemct.org)**

by selecting: **ON DEMAND** menu items.